

Before leaving London for Christmas festivities in the country, the Duke and his new ally, Lord Percy, had held deep consultations over the plan of action to be adopted.<sup>1</sup> The meagre grant of the Commons had been duly collected in September, and money had again to be demanded of a fresh Parliament. They determined on making certain concessions to public opinion, in view of the necessity of holding a Parliament in January. In the first place, the Treasury and Chancery were put into the hands of two Bishops.<sup>2</sup> The mere fact of bringing churchmen into the ministry at all, was a sign of weakness, a reversal of the principle laid down in 1371, a peace offering to Convocation, which assembled at St. Paul's a few weeks later. An attempt was also made to eradicate from the popular mind the impression that, those in power were disloyal to the young Prince Richard. The confiscated temporalities of the Bishopric of Winchester were made over to him, and the King was induced to allow his grandson and heir to open the Parliament, which he himself was too ill to attend.<sup>3</sup>

Besides a few cheap concessions, the ministers took more effectual measures to prevent a repetition of the scenes of last summer. The knights and gentry of the counties were the class of whom the present Government had most cause to be afraid. But the Crown had always a check on their action. The sheriff of each shire was an officer appointed by the ministers at Westminster. Now the lack of any clearly defined statute law about the election and return of members of the Commons enabled the sheriff either to summon only such electors as he thought fit, or to return his own nominee as duly elected when no election had taken place.<sup>4</sup> In January 1377, John of Gaunt and his allies succeeded in tampering with the returns so effectually that a House of Commons was sent up of a very different political complexion from the last. The statement of the chronicler, which reflects the general opinion of the time and is more than confirmed by other evidence, runs as follows : \* The

» *Chron. A. ng. t* 109-<sup>a</sup> *P&d\**, **Hi.**

**106ff.**  
» *Ibid.* iii 1070, 1075;  
» *ot. Perk.* i. l. 861, \* *St.*,  
**iii-** 427-37; *Mot.*